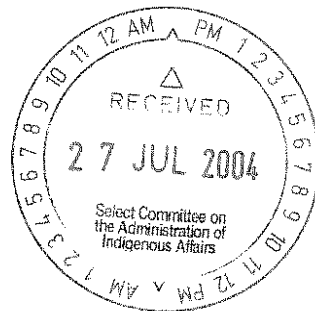


Jonathan Curtis
The Secretary
The Senate
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2601

Monday, 19 July 2004

**RE: SUBMISSION TO THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON THE
ADMINISTRATION OF INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS**



Dear Secretary

The purpose of this submission is to briefly outline my concerns in regard to the 'governance model' that will eventually replace the former ATSIC structure. In particular I wish to focus on a few inherent difficulties associated with service delivery to particularly, grass roots Indigenous people in the urban, rural and remote regions.

Indigenous Participation in Indigenous Programs

This submission does not imply that I oppose the abolition of ATSIC as put before the Senate, because there may well be opportunity in 'mainstreaming' for improved outcomes and service delivery. Mainstreaming is the government's new way of doing business; however, I am concerned that there will be less opportunity for Indigenous people to participate in the delivery of Indigenous programs and services. This may have a negative impact on transparency and achieving positive outcomes. My first comment to the Committee therefore is that in the new structure of government mechanisms need to be in place to ensure that appropriate forms of Indigenous participation are adequately maintained. As yet these mechanisms are not clear.

Control of Cash – the control of money on the ground.

Indigenous programs often fail on the ground when there is a capacity for individual community members or the governing council to handle money relating to the program. For example a program aimed at women's health may have the best of intentions and be based on local need, however if the program funds are able to be controlled by individuals within a community, in my experience it is almost always the case that the funds will be utilised in the self interest of the individual's or governing council, at the expense of the wider community. These people are able to get away with the selfish plunder of program generated resources and opportunity under the guise of self-determination (to fend off weak bureaucrats reluctant to step in) or/and sheer cultural bullying amongst other members of the community.

This control of cash should remain squarely outside community self interest. How will the government ensure that these cultural gatekeepers don't prevail within the new arrangements?

Adequate representation across the community

Appropriately, the point of contact for individuals delivering government programs within Aboriginal communities are the 'Administrator' or 'Council Clerk' who is the actual 'front desk' of governing councils within the community. A good administrator or clerk will ensure that all information reaches the governing council and a good governing council should ensure that all information is then delivered to the appropriate sectors of the community. This however often does not always occur, therefore despite elected representation, community member's on the ground often do not have a direct input into Indigenous programs that affect them. In some places this practice had become entrenched. To therefore avoid the occurrence of administrative gate keeping Government programs need to rigorously ensure that the appropriate community members are consulted.

One of the more successful models for community participation in Government programs is the example established through the Murdi Paaki Regional Council. This Council encompasses a region that forms one of the pilot COAG sites. Within the structure of the COAG experiment a number of 'community working parties' (CWP) have been established. I attach to my submission a copy of the Murdi Paaki CWP for the Select Committee's perusal.

The CWP's are made up of representatives that are specific to the program and in this way Government officials actually deal with a cross section of relevant community members who are directly impacted upon by the program concerned. This structure enables youth and other community members to be involved in consultation with government and appears to be somewhat more flexible than the standard model of consulting with the Administrator/Clerk as the main point of contact. I would suggest that the government examine the Murdi Paaki model with the view of encouraging a consultative model for government programs that is squarely directed to those who are relevant on the ground. I also attach a draft framework of a Charter for the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly for your perusal.

An appropriate voice

Lastly I'd like to make brief comment on the structure from which the new Indigenous voice will be heard. There are many proposed models out there put forward by politicians, Land Councils and indigenous organisations eager to secure their own place in this brave new world. My principle observation is that the focus is mainly on money, power, influence and kudos rather than an appropriate structure or voice. On this issue I simply draw your attention to the 'key principles and values' for a National Indigenous Representative Body that was formulated by a wide range of informed fellow colleagues at the recent Indigenous Leaders Conference (organised by *Reconciliation Australia* and the *Australian Indigenous Leadership Centre*), Adelaide 11-14 June 2004.

They are quoted below:

- We the Indigenous People of Australia and we alone have the right to determine who represents us locally, regionally, nationally & internationally.
- We are determined to establish a sustainable independent National Indigenous Representative Body that reflects the aspirations and values of our peoples.
- The National Indigenous Representative Body needs to gain its legitimacy from our people.
- Any process to establish a National Indigenous Representative Body must acknowledge who we are, honour our diversity and commit to inclusive processes for all our people.
- Our National Indigenous Representative Body must be open, transparent and accountable to the Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- We respect and are committed to the right of our peoples to make free and informed choices for them, their families and communities.
- We have an obligation to respect and protect our right to self-determination, our human rights, our humanity, our First Peoples' status and our inherent rights that flow from that status.
- We have a duty to pursue social justice & economic development for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- Our duty is to leave a lasting legacy for our grandchildren's grandchildren.

Should you wish me to elaborate on any matter raised in this document I may be contacted directly on my mobile 0417810769.

Yours sincerely

Des Rogers